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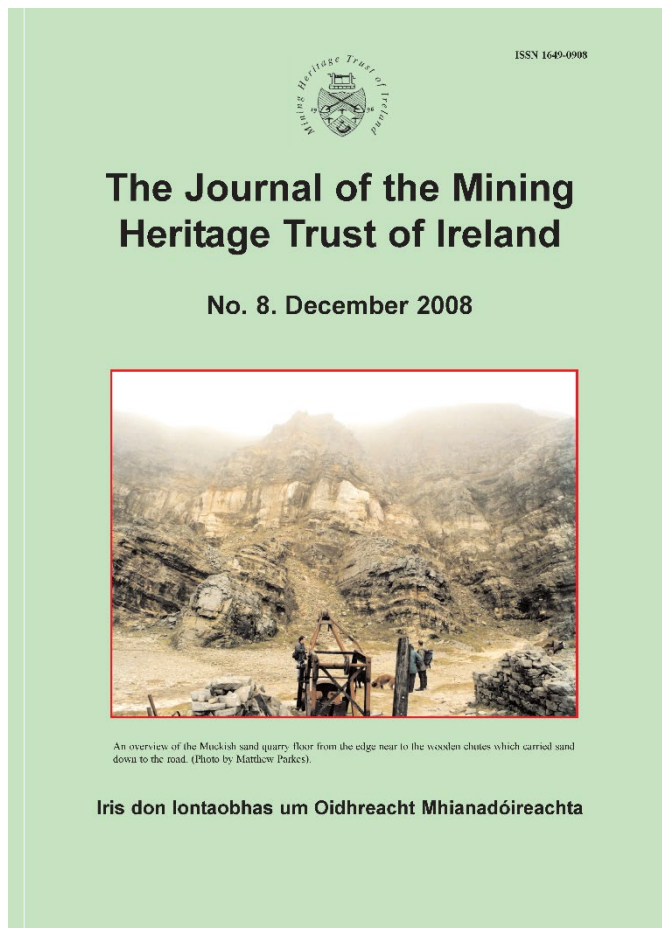
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TWO KERRY LEAD-SILVER MINES: KENMARE AND CASTLEMAINE

by Des Cowman

Abstract: This is a reconstructed version of an already published article (Cowman 1990). Kenmare was the more significant location, being worked at various locations north of the river Roughty (that flows into Kenmare Bay) for iron in the 17th century and for copper and lead in the 18th and 19th centuries. Out of the earlier 19th century came bizarre reportage of dead men and crazed litigation; an early 1850s doomed attempt to mine for lead there was shrouded in self righteous justifications. Castlemaine was a superficial lead showing worked briefly in the late 18th century over-optimistically recommended by Thomas Weaver and unsuccessfully worked by him c1825-1829. Then in the early 1850s it unaccountably became the selected location for a major mining scam involving one Henry Gibbons. *Journal of the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland*, 8, 2008, 39-46.

17TH & 18TH CENTURY WORKINGS

A report with attributed date of 1497 states that there are three locations in Kerry with argentiferous lead but it names only one of these - Glanneroghe, (Glen of the Roughty river?) near Kenmare. The second probably was at Castlemaine while the third goes unlocated although there are several possible locations (Hamner Papers). It is unlikely that any of the three were worked in the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries, the first positive mention of working being at Glanneroght in 1610.

In 1610 the mineralised zone near **Kenmare** was leased to a Mr Brocas and company. Presumably there had been previous testing and negotiation but the records remain silent about whether he eventually worked it or not. More than a half-century passed before there is definite mention of mining at Kenmare. This was William Petty's operation, beginning about 1667 but the mineral sought was iron. A listing of forty-eight workmen there connected with iron working (i.e. including smelting) in 1670 gives only three of them as miners (Carew Survey). This limited operation apparently continued until the political upheaval of the late 1680s when the works closed down, or as a later account rather coyly puts it, 'In 1685 the natives began to annoy these settlers' (Lewis 1, p. 37). In any case the forests that had provided the fuel for smelting had almost been exhausted in the Kenmare area so it was decided to move the operation to Killarney (Carew Survey). The slag from this Ardtully operation was still visible nearly 200 years later (MJ 1853, 29th Jan.).

Whether the presence of lead was noted during the thirty years or so of iron working at **Kenmare** goes unrecorded. However, in 1722 Ardtully townland was leased to a Joseph Bacon who mined here for about eight years. He surrendered his lease in 1731 which presumably finished that phase of mining (The Kenmare Ms.). It may have been quite a significant operation to judge from the large open-cast it left, a quarter of a mile long and seventy yards wide with timbering still visible at the bottom in 1762 when it was deemed, according to the custom of the time, as being of 'Danish' origin (Carew Survey). The remains were noted again in 1818 as 'a considerable excavation' though by then it was more accurately identified as an eighteenth-century mine and the tradition recorded of it having produced 'several cargoes' of copper (Weaver 1819). Apparently no further attempt had been made to work it in the eighteenth century.

By the late eighteenth century the entire mineralised area along the Roughty valley was in the possession of Arthur Dillon who leased it in 1786 to Richard Orpen for three lives. Dillon was obviously aware of the mineral potential as he kept the mining rights which included the right to 300 acres of land adjoining any mine-working by him or his heirs (Croker vs. Orpen).

Mining in **Castlemaine** according to one report began in 1788 and was worked by a company started by the landlord, Sir John Godfrey possibly in association with Rowland Blennerhassett of Churchtown. Reportedly, over three years 400 tons of silver-rich lead were extracted from a working that went to a depth of 72 feet (Godfrey Papers). A local man, born in 1770, passed on his folk memory of this in 1852 stating that the mine opened when he was nine or ten (i.e. c. 1780). He names the operators as James and Thomas Eager and Thomas Giles who were joined later by Blennerhassett. He recalls that they had reached only 18 to 20 feet when the mine flooded overnight (it was in limestone) and a windlass with bucket failed to unwater it. (RHMC Prospectus, David Mannix 1st June 1852). When the mine was re-examined by Thomas Weaver in the early 19th century there was a large open-cast in Annagh townland (Figure. 1). The story he got was that this open-cast became too costly for the developers to continue safely so an attempt was made to get at the deeper ore by sinking either shafts or levels but the timbering in the shafts collapsed and the operation was abandoned (Weaver 1825).

EARLY 19TH CENTURY MINING

In 1828 the **Kenmare** lease along the Roughty was renewed by John Dillon Croker to Richard T. Orpen with the same wording as in 1786. In 1834, however, it seems that Dillon Croker decided to exercise his right to investigate the minerals on the land and employed Thomas Weaver to do so. Weaver had already tested the area in 1824 on behalf of the Hibernian Mining Company and was somewhat dismissive of it (Weaver 1825). Nothing he saw in 1835 caused him to change his mind. Nevertheless, in 1838 Dillon Croker served notice on Orpen that he intended mining and requested permission to survey and fence off 300 acres. Orpen refused as he believed this was a ploy by Dillon Croker to get his hands on improved land, including part of the pleasure gardens of his house (Croker vs Orpen & MJ 1846, p.275).

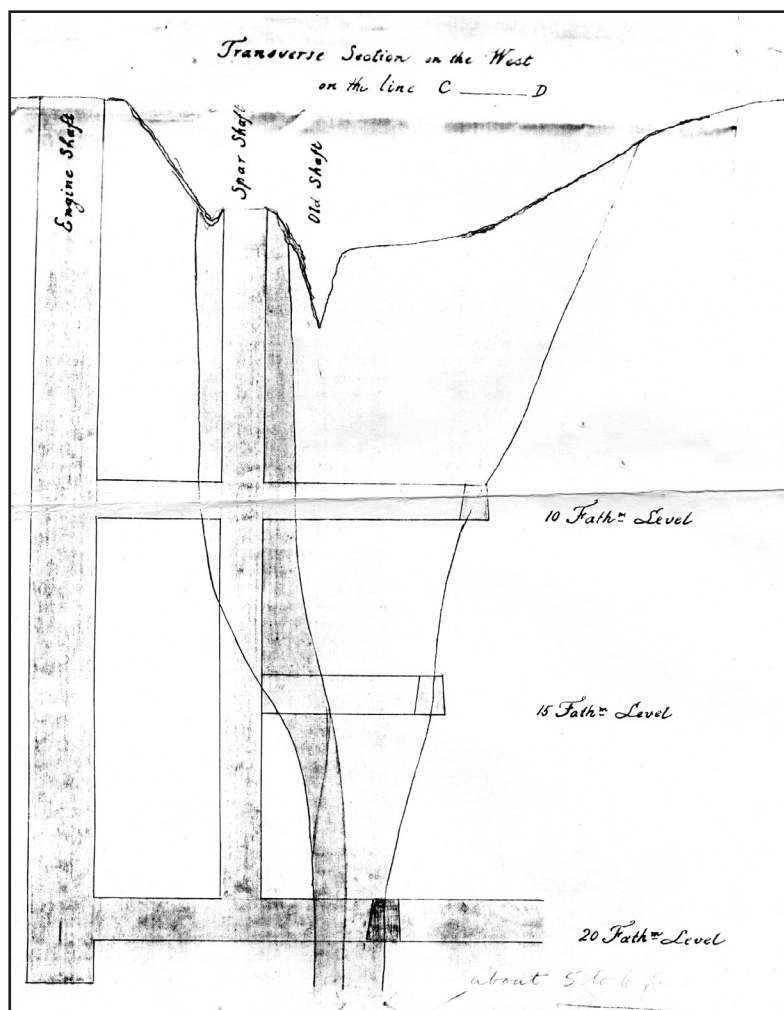


Figure 1. The open-cast in Castlemaine worked in the 1780s as per Thomas Weaver 40 years later. It seems to be under 20 fathoms deep as reported locally.

There is, however, an alternative version of this story narrated by the Skibbereen Correspondent of the *Mining Journal* on the basis, he says, of documentation seen by him (MJ 1860, p. 670). According to him Dillon lost the land to Orpen in a game of cards but managed to salvage the mineral rights. About 1830 Dillon Croker came across mention of mining near Kenmare in his family papers. According to this version he decided to investigate and was eventually directed to the bedside of a very old man known as 'M' who drew him a sketch showing the corner of a field where lead might be found. Dillon Croker dug there and found - a corpse! This caused local bafflement as nobody was missing but since 'M' had just died no more light could be thrown on this. It was decided to dig further holes in the field to see if there were any more corpses there. They dug and found - copper! Dillon Croker then decided to invoke the clauses in the lease which allowed him the mining rights.

Whatever the circumstances of Dillon Croker's discovery of copper on the lands at Ardtully, it was reported in 1838 that the mine had just been started and was proceeding 'with great spirit'. Requiring finance and expertise for continued working Dillon Croker formed the *Kenmare Mining Association* in partnership with Messrs Cornish, Lieven and Ewebank in April 1839 and early in 1840 they sold their first ore, 77 tons of copper ore which fetched £1,132-13s-6d. (Griffith 1839 & MJ 1840, p. 200 & 213)

A mines inspector visited there at Easter 1841, the mine's most successful year when 274 tons of copper were raised and sold in Swansea. A hundred people were employed there at the time, he states, between the copper and lead mines. He describes the local people as being 'wretchedly poor' but does grant 'they looked quite healthy and well'. He interviewed three teenage surface-workers who had never been employed before and they all claimed to be happy to be working there. They started at 7 a.m., worked for 2½ hours and then had a three-quarter hour breakfast break. After that they worked straight through for 8¼ hours until 6 p.m. They were paid on output which averaged 4d-6d per day (Roper).

Presumably the mine workers did not know the details of the litigation which had meanwhile been going through the courts. Orpen had regarded Croker's operations on the Ardtully leasehold as trespass and he presented his case before the Kerry summer assizes in 1839. The jury disagreed about their respective mineral rights, so it went to the assizes of the following spring where judgement was given in favour of Dillon Croker. His lawyer, however, expressed himself as being unhappy about security to title now that the mine was making money and recommended that it should be decided by Queen's Bench in London. There it was debated in the winter of 1840-41. The learned decision was that the matter should be retried in Kerry. At the spring assizes there of 1842 the jury again found for Dillon Croker but Orpen was then advised to appeal back to the court of Queen's Bench which this time gave him a partial vindication. Dillon Croker was now advised to appeal this to the Court of Chancery which he did in June 1846. He lost, judgement and costs being given to Orpen. However, reportedly Orpen had to sell the lease to pay his previous legal costs and an impoverished Dillon Croker had to sell the freehold and his mineral rights. The buyers were the respective lawyers! (Croker vs Orpen). The sale of the Dillon Croker estate took place in 1851 but it was carefully noted "minerals not vested" (L.E.C).

However, there had been six years of reasonably impressive copper production with 68 tons in 1842 (it appears that the operation was suspended for part of that year because of a dispute with the mine manager) and 361 tons in the years 1843-46 (Min. Stats). The mine then closed, due to 'an unfortunate and unseen event' according to Dillon Croker (MJ 1846, p.286 and 283 ed. comment)). He then, apparently undeterred by previous experience, wrote to the *Mining Journal* saying that he also intended to smelt iron at Ardtully using turf. Next day he wrote again asking how much it would cost to do so. A week later, unashamedly, he wrote once more saying that he should have read Robert Kane's recent work *The Industrial Resources of Ireland*, (Dublin 1844, with second edition 1845) where all is explained and he proceeded to quote Kane (MJ 1846, 283 two letters and 287). Two editorials then proceeded to praise Dillon Croker: he was 'a man of whom we cannot speak too highly' (MJ 1846 p. 248 & 286). Nevertheless, no more is heard of either these iron works or copper mining there until 1851 when Kenmare became part of the 'bubble boom'.

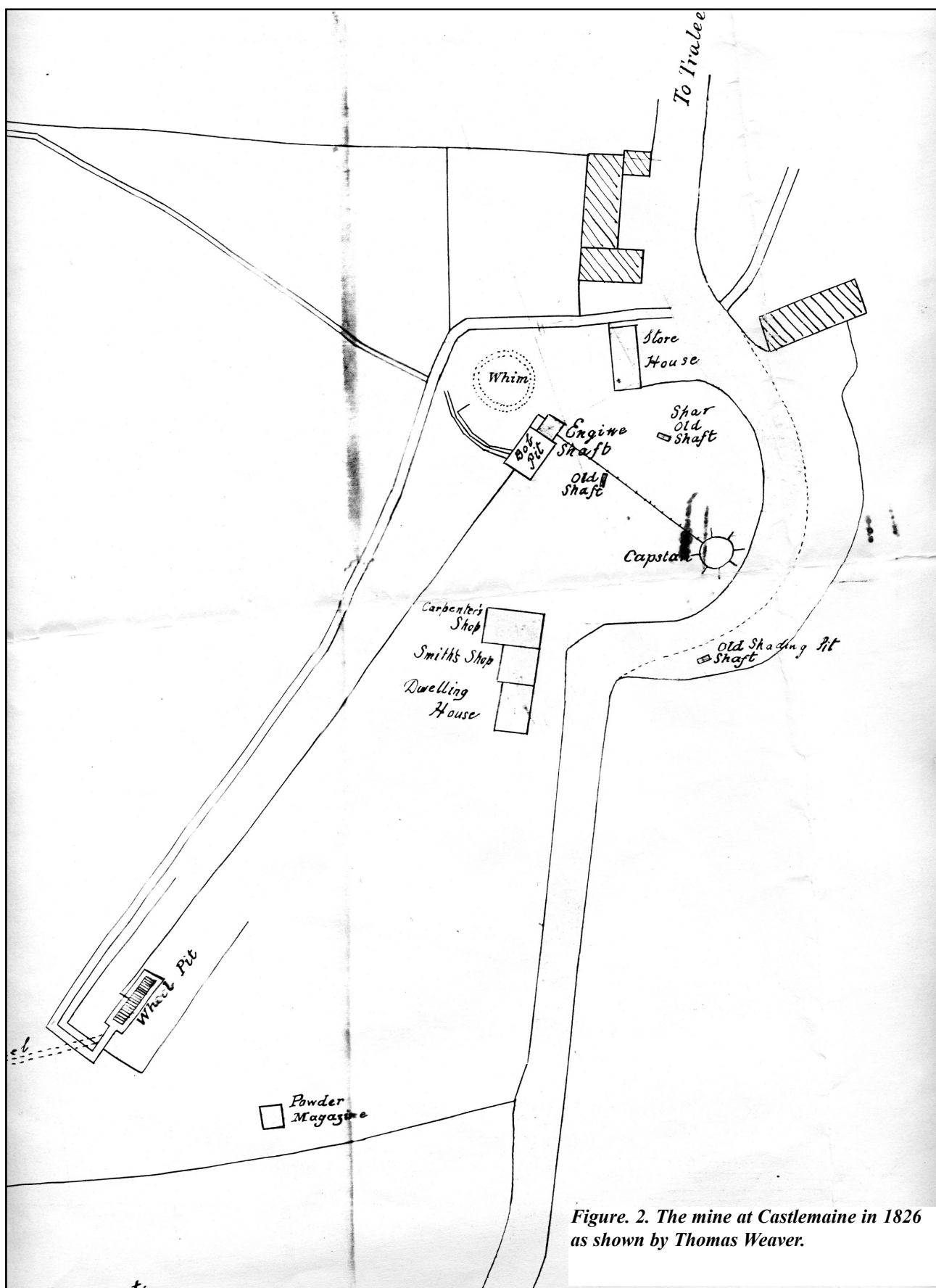


Figure. 2. The mine at Castlemaine in 1826 as shown by Thomas Weaver.

Castlemaine had a very different history. It was also visited in 1824 by Thomas Weaver on behalf of the newly formed Hibernian Mining Company. He found the flooded opencast left after the late 18th century working and concluded that this was worth pumping out. To do so he erected a waterwheel and over

three miles of watercourse to drive it. (Plan 1828, fig. 2) The old pit was successfully thus drained and mining commenced. How much ore was extracted goes unreported but it is highly unlikely that it was worth the £6227 that the entire development cost (Weaver 1824-31). While closure was inevitable, a later

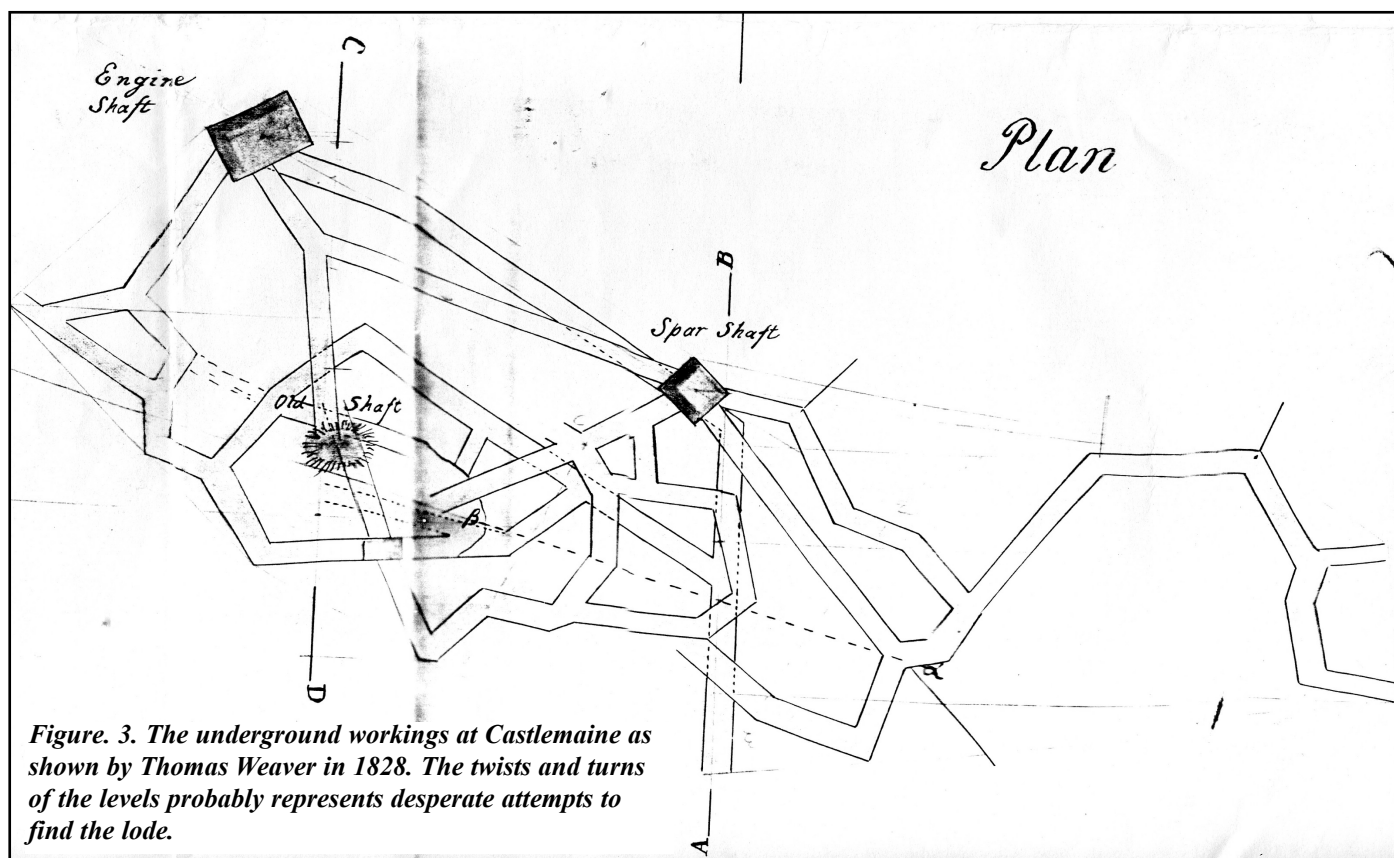
report gives a specific circumstance. The watercourse to the wheel overflowed its banks and the water flowed through fissures in the rock and flooded the mine in 1829 (MJ 1852, 255). This was only one of the misfortunes that destined the Hibernian Mining Company to fold two years later (Cowman 2002, 32).

THE BUBBLE COMPANIES OF THE 1850S

Dillon Croker would appear to have played no active part in mineral mining in Kenmare after his abortive iron-smelting operation and what financial involvement he might have had goes unrecorded. Possibly he sold out his interest to a company headed by William Connell in the mid-1840s. Reportedly they paid £1200 for the rights (MJ 1846, 283 & 285). William Connell (also promoter of various dubious mining ventures in west Cork) then set up a company which he called *The Kenmare and West of Ireland Mining Company* which included a very dubious collection of directors (Cowman 1988). There then followed a barrage of publicity about the new venture (MJ 1845, 160; 1852, 155, 268 & 278). It seems that the directors as individuals bought the rights to land and minerals for £3700 which, once they got shareholders' money, they sold to the company for £5000. Twenty thousand £1 shares had been offered to the public accompanied by a barrage of publicity. The editor of the *Mining Journal*, who normally lauded indiscriminately all Irish mining enterprises, was sceptical. He counted nineteen different publicity prospecti in circulation and took the unusual step of writing to himself as editor wondering why £20,000 should have to be raised for a mine that was unlikely to have £20,000 worth of ore in it. Reportedly 15,610 shares were sold though how much money this brought in is not clear as it was suggested that shares were being sold off for whatever the directors

could get for them. (MJ 1851, 404; 1852, 74 & 99). Such activity, however, was typical of the large number of companies set up in London in the early 1850s to exploit a certain post-famine sympathetic gullibility about Ireland's supposed mineral resources.

Some of the money thus raised does seem to have been spent in Kenmare in 1851 - over £5000 according to one report. However, since no formal financial statements would appear to have been issued to shareholders it is difficult to know what was really happening to judge from the reports of their half-AGMs and *Mining Journal* correspondence thereon. Captain William Thomas was in charge of the operation and early in 1852 he was quoted as saying that he would soon be raising 60 or 70 tons of lead per month. That stimulated the directors into considering issuing a dividend (MJ 1851, 404; 1852, 74, 99, 225, 234). Meanwhile, mining had gone ahead at Ardtully and 1852-'53 a grand total of 480 tons of lead was sold for £3100 (Min.Stats.). However, the cost of extracting, processing and shipping this ore amounted to about twice this income! Nevertheless, the directors now felt they should celebrate by declaring a dividend of 1s 6d in the £ which is said to have cost them £1200. More caustic comment on paying this dividend out of these 'supposed profits' is that it was really a ploy 'to booster up the market' in the company's shares (MJ 1852, 74, 225, 234). Substance was lent to this by the lack of any further record of ore sales. Recriminations begin early in 1854 with the allegation that the reason for the failure of the mine was that the engine was sited in the wrong place. This was followed by the sacking of Captain Thomas for mismanagement, according to the directors, but according to himself it was because he '*never will furnish reports to please the directors and to deceive shareholders*'. A public wrangle then followed between himself and



his successor about whether any ore at all had been produced! (MJ 1854, 8, 213, 504, 532, 536, 548-9, 573, 815).

Meanwhile, the miners were not being paid. At the Bantry quarter session in March 1853 three of them (Leary, Harrington and Owney who had probably been brought in from Allihies) were charged with stealing ten shillings from the mining company. They claimed they had been sacked with twenty six shillings owing to them. The jury found them technically guilty but recommended that no further action be taken. Nevertheless, the justices sentenced them to three months hard labour! (CE 4 March 1853; MJ 1854 556, 624; 665)) By July 1854 the company had exhausted its capital. Only £197 was left and the miners had still not been paid. By October the company were £1320 in debt and shareholders were asked for three shillings per share to pay this off. Meanwhile, the miners in Kenmare had seized whatever ore was on the surface in lieu of their pay; one of the engines (there may have been two) had also been seized in place of taxes due; the other engine was running on recycled cinders because there was no money to buy more coal; and finally a flood had washed away the banks of the reservoir of water to run their waterwheel (MJ 1854, 740).

At a meeting called to deal with these crises the directors admitted that insufficient responses to the 3shillings call had been received and that there was no option but to dissolve the company. Amidst recriminations this was done (MJ 1854, 780). The sale took place in December 1854 and lease plus freehold and stock fetched a pathetic £1010, leaving shareholders to pay further liabilities of up to £3000. It was suggested that the sale itself was suspect but satisfaction was expressed that the Kenmare mine had at least come into the hands of an Irish company (MJ 1854, 855, 856, 871).

This Irish company comprised mainly a group from the Geology Department of T.C.D. under Professor Haughton. They took the appropriate name Trinity Mining Company. Meanwhile another London based company had already been set up to work the nearby townland of Cahir West and they seem to have called themselves either the *Lansdowne Mining Company* or *Shanagarry Copper, Silver and Lead Mining Company* - or both (MJ 1854, 328, 740, 788). Little has emerged about this Lansdowne/Shanagarry company except that in early 1853 'a wealthy party of gentlemen from London' offered 25,000 £1 shares to the public (MJ 1853, 68 & 75). Apparently they did gather enough investment to commence operations at Shanagarry and cleared out the old workings to over 200 feet (MJ 1853 29 Jan.) They were reported to have had about 120 tons of silver-rich lead ready for shipment in November 1854. The boat that was bringing this ore to Wales in January 1855 hit rough weather off the west Cork coast and seemingly had to jettison the ore near Spanish Cove! That apparently put an end to the Lansdowne/Shanagarry Company as no more is heard of it (MJ 1854, 740; 1855, 109; 1860, 776).

Some detail does survive about the Trinity Mining Company's operation. In December 1854 Professor Haughton gave a lecture to the Geological Society of Dublin on the mineralogy of the Kenmare area and he suggested that the veins there were possibly an extension of the rich Allihies copper lode (Haughton 1855). It seems he persuaded his T.C.D. colleagues

of this and the company they set up comprised ten shares of £1800 each. Initially it seemed that Haughton was right as they hit copper at Muckera, apparently previously unworked, and raised an unstated amount of ore from an open-cast there. Likewise at Cleady they sold 134 tons in the summer of 1855. In eighteen months of working up to that time it was claimed that a total of 215 tons of copper was sold privately for £1 238. The mine captain who gave this information in a letter to the Mining Journal added this odd plea: 'If any of your correspondents could inform me where a letter might find R. M'Cullen and H. V. East, two of the Kenmare mine directors, or what has become of their superintendent, Captain James Skimming, I'd feel obliged' (MJ 1854, 328 & 740; 1855, 38, 119, 150, 312, 360, 362)

No more is reported of the Trinity Mining Company! Presumably it had become obvious that the copper of the Kenmare area existed only in isolated pockets and were not an extension of the Allihies lode as the Professor had supposed. By 1857 the workings were reported to be flooded and when inspected then shortly afterwards very little evidence of any working could be found (MJ 157, 780; Mems. Geol. Surv. 1860). One possible spin-off from all this interest in the Kenmare area was the setting up of the *Hartropp and West Kerry Mining Company* which intended to mine another supposed extension of the Allihies lodes at West Cove near Caherdaniel on the north shore of Kenmare bay. It was to be under the direction of William Thomas, late of the Kenmare and West of Ireland Mining Company. The editor of the Mining Journal, as though to make up for his previous ungraciousness towards the latter company, lauded this new enterprise in two separate editorials on the same page while the obverse side of the page carried a prospectus for the new company. This offered 15,000 £1 shares to the public and William Thomas' report is cited as promising a new Allihies. Quoted as endorsing this prospect was the respected figure of John Petherick, the successful Mining Company of Ireland's senior mining captain (MJ 1852, 204 & 406).

John Petherick wrote four letters to the Mining Journal over the next few weeks (July 1852) denying any endorsement but saying he had inspected the site some fifteen years earlier on behalf of his company and recommended a trial. A number of shafts had been sunk on the lode at West Cove at a cost of £1181 but they had proved barren at depth and he saw no point in unwatering them again (MJ 1852, 427, 451, 472, 486). The company did their best to counter this devastating dismissal of their prospects but the damage had been done (MJ 1852, 525). As an anonymous 'one of the very few who have paid deposits' stated, he would never have invested only for the citing of Petherick's approval and he accused the promoters of '*suppression ver et suggestio falsi*'. Other actual and potential investors must have reacted the same way as it was reported early in 1853 that the company had failed - apparently without breaking a single rock (MJ 1852, 486; 1853, 68 & 200).

To the north-west of there was **Castlemaine** where Annagh lead mine had been abandoned again in the late 1820s. It was the focus of the most egregious bubble scam in Irish mining history. Henry Gibson fronted this and the company that he set up was the grandiosely named Royal Hibernian Mining Company

by a consortium that had just been involved in a mining shares scandal relating to 'The Great Welsh Silver-Lead Mine' and another in Cornwall. What attracted these dubious promoters to Castlemaine in 1851 goes unrecorded but some of the strategies they used in London to promote this mine are clear enough (MJ 1853, 70). In lauding Kerry's mineral potential the promoters deemed it "inestimable" with no sense of the irony of literal truth (RHMC Prospectus).

The company's most potent way of raising money was the personality and self-publicising activities of the company's 'front man', Henry Gibson. Early in 1852 a number of anonymous articles (presumably stemming from Gibson himself) began to appear in the *Mining Journal*:

In Mr Henry Gibson of 17 Gracechurch St. they (Irish mines) have at last found a proper champion (MJ 1852, 234).

Ireland will long have cause to bless the hour when he put foot on its soil. . . . Kerry set to become the Cornwall of Ireland - (HG) likely to prove one of Ireland 's greatest benefactors (MJ 1852, 189 & 249).

(HG) will have nearly 10,000 of its population in his employ before mid-summer 1853 (MJ 1852, 295).

It was then announced that the great man himself with an entourage of directors would personally come to Castlemaine to open the mine. The Kerry papers took up the refrain: '*The sun is at least beginning to dawn over Desmond*', crowed the Kerry Evening Post at the prospect. The Tralee Chronicle duly echoed everything said in praise of Ireland in general and Kerry in particular ('the new Cornwall of Ireland'), and looked forward to the 'dawn of a new era' there (KEP 17th March 1852; TC 20th March 1852). Through early to mid-March 1852 further details of the grand opening of Castlemaine mine were disclosed to the waiting public. There would be a great *fete champetre* or picnic banquet to mark the event. Details of the party's route and dress were also revealed in advance. They were to be adorned with 'green silk scarves emblazoned in gold with the harp, crown and shamrock'. Their journey from Dublin to Castlemaine was then duly reported as a 'triumphant progress' with arches, flags, addresses of welcome, temperance bands, etc. at unspecified places along the way. All shops and offices in Tralee were closed to see the splendid entourage pass, with Gibson and his fellow directors being carried shoulder-high through the town by a grateful populace (MJ 1852, 249 & 279).

At least such were the anonymous reports fed back to London. The fete itself was a magnificent affair, reportedly, and an artist would seem to have been employed by Gibson to capture the occasion for posterity - and presumably for potential investors (see fig. 4). His sketch shows perhaps 1000 people seated at tables being addressed by dignitaries from a flag-festooned platform while an orderly peasantry look respectfully on. The fare, we are told, was capons, ducks, turkeys, geese, venison and roast meats washed down by hock and champagne. The *Kerry Examiner* was reported in London to have devoted half its issue to describing this event and expressing gratitude to Gibson - somewhat of a representative exaggeration, since less than one-eighth was given over to reporting the event (MJ 1852, 272 & 295; KE 1st June 1852). When it was over and the tables cleared the directors were invited to examine the site that was to employ 10,000 people within thirteen months. A number

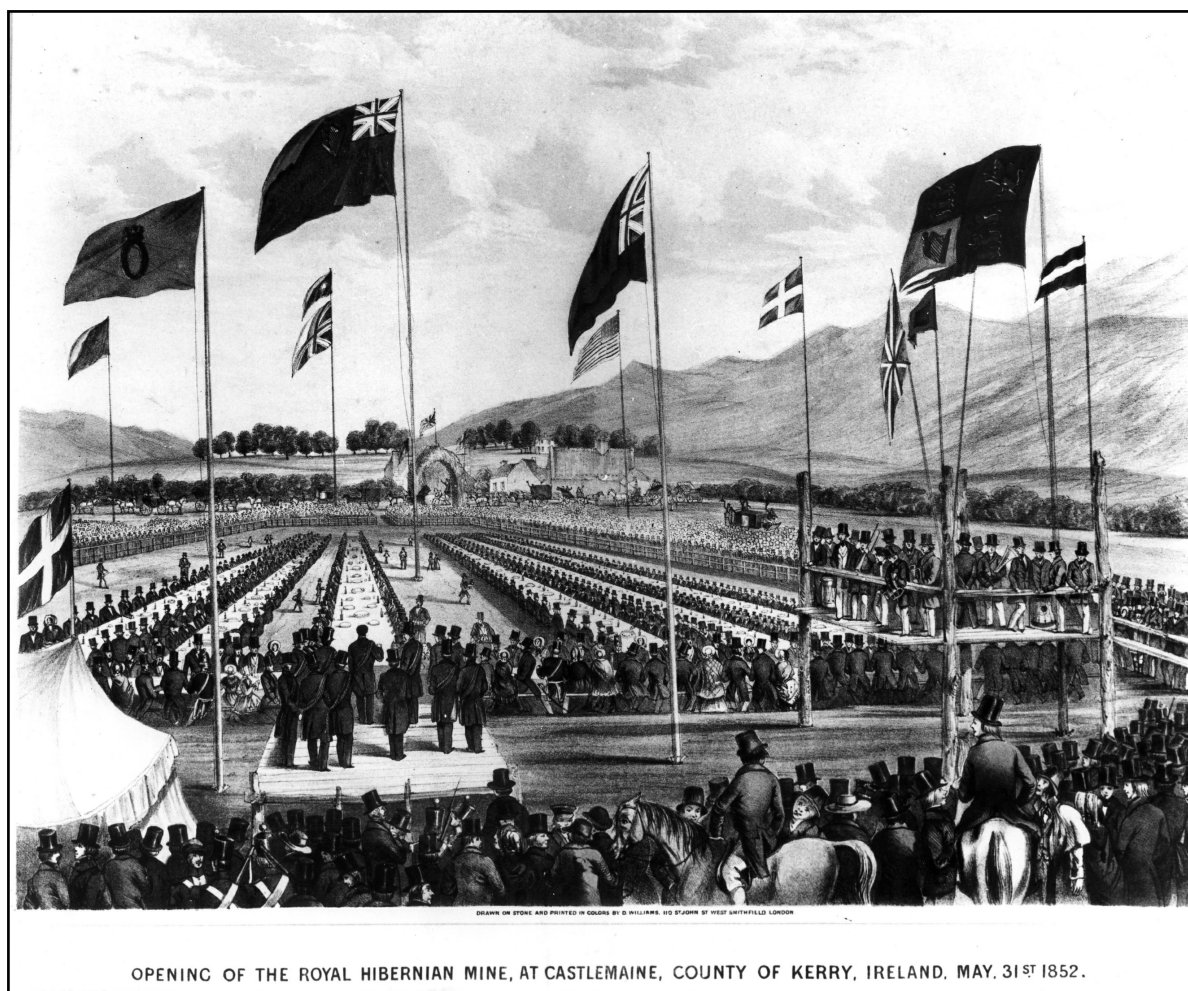
of these prospective employees followed them to Annagh where Gibson invited them to try digging in the soil there, whereupon, according to one of the directors, '*in less than twenty minutes they cut the surface lode and we all filled our pockets with pure lead-silver*' (MJ 1852, 364). Seeding a mining site in advance is one of the oldest ploys in mining promotion but perhaps it worked and the party returned to London full of all they had seen and done at Castlemaine.

Over the next two months one would expect the local papers to have made some attempt to monitor what was happening at Castlemaine mine. Instead they carried promotional material reporting on the success of Gibson and Partners' other enterprise, 'The Great Welsh Mine', with the implication that the same was reflected in Kerry (KEP July, e.g 2nd, & Sept. 1852, passim). Meanwhile, in London it seems that others were ready to cash in on the publicity that Castlemaine had attracted. In May 1853 both the *Mining Journal* (MJ 1853, 293-4) and Cork Weekly Examiner (CWE 19th May 1853) carried ads offering shares in an *East Annagh Silver Lead Mining Company* whose prospectus referred to a 'highly metalliferous district' and goes on to extol the 'low prices of provisions and labour' locally (MJ 1854, 293).

The editor of the *Mining Journal* praised this enterprise (MJ 1854, 294) but provides no comment on the fact that a third mining company is named in the advertisement - *The Clogher-Lisolin Silver Lead Mining Company*. There could well have been a fourth company with the title *Kerry Lead* in existence which prompted the Dublin correspondent of the *Mining Journal* to wonder if these were not really all the same company (MJ 1854, 788). They must have been fronts to gather investment for Gibson and Co. as the Royal Hibernian Company claimed to own the mineral rights to Clogher and Lisolin (RHMC Prospectus). In any case, no more is heard of this.

There may well have been sceptics at the time of the grand opening but their voices were presumably drowned out by the general acclaim. How quickly disillusionment set in among the locals goes unrecorded though the first whisperings of questioning appear in the *Mining Journal* in March 1853. However, according to the company's own report only £1059 was spent on the mine in twelve months over 1852. They rather tamely blamed bad weather for their failure to raise ore but said they were continuing their explorations (MJ 1853, 134 & 171). The ever-optimistic William Thomas, however, persisted in praising the area's mineral potential mentioning "a deposit of galena in a cavern of limestone" there (MJ 1853, 312).

The only tangible evidence of the company's endeavours at Castlemaine was a strange circular wall which one observer deemed to be a collar around a shaft but which local wits decided was a windmill symbolising what the company did best - i.e. 'raising the wind' (MJ 1853, 675 & 707). By the end of 1853 it seems that all pretence at mining in Castlemaine had ceased and the company's sole sphere of activities lay in the law courts. How all the initial promotion was paid for, of course, is not stated though the provenance of the flags at the grand opening may well illustrate the procedures used. They were made by sail-maker Peter Doyle of Wapping who not alone was unpaid but



OPENING OF THE ROYAL HIBERNIAN MINE, AT CASTLEMAINE, COUNTY OF KERRY, IRELAND, MAY, 31ST 1852.

Figure 4. The great fete champetre of May 1852 in Castlemaine as depicted by Henry Gibson's artist presumably for circulation in London as a promotional exercise. It is obvious that the artist had never been to Castlemaine to judge from the topography; the human element is likely to be equally fictitious.

persuaded to part with £200 for the honour of being made a director of the other mine in Cornwall. It was not reported how successful the company's promotional extravaganza was, though it was suggested that shares had not been made available for the first six months (i.e. until November 1852) when 10,000 shares were released to an eager public along with a prospectus (MJ 1852, 554 et seq.). It was then reported that all were sold within a month though a month later again (January 1853) they had reverted to being 'in great demand' (MJ 1853, 6). It was later admitted that just over half had been sold, £5,469 worth (MJ 1853, 664 & 659).

One reported incident might well exemplify the tactics used by the directors to sell shares in the company. Rueben Plant had become something of a celebrity in that, despite humble origins as a coalminer, he had managed to become rich. He claimed that Gibson had contacted him to ask his advice about removing a twelve ton boulder of pure lead from Ireland to London for exhibition purposes. Plant took the bait and expressed interest in a mine that could produce such riches. Gibson graciously said he could manage to get Plant £600 worth of shares. The ex-coalminer, however, was not to be so easily taken in and insisted on inspecting the mine before parting with his money. He came to Ireland although it is not clear whether he ever actually reached Castlemaine. He was dined and indeed wined so lavishly that he certainly never got to see the mine but returned

home with its praises ringing in his ears and also basking in the picture that had been projected of himself as setting an example for Ireland of what a self-made man could do. He parted with his money and was appointed as "Consulting Engineer" (MJ 1854, 846; R H M C Prospectus). Little of the money thus raised wound up in Castlemaine.

There had apparently been some sort of a split among the directors of the company in the spring of 1853 and Gibson (who had not been named in any capacity in the

RHMC Prospectus) would seem to have left them though he still held shares (which he would have got for nothing). The other directors took the unusual step of placing an obscurely worded ad in the Mining Journal assuring the public that 'no derangement has taken place in the management of this company' (MJ 1853, 348). Whatever undertones there were in this caused three anonymous correspondents (or just the one - H.G.) to write to that journal defending Henry Gibson (MJ 1853, 364, 370, 706). The paid-up shareholders were not reassured by any of this and through the summer of 1853 began to question the entire operation (MJ 1853, 418, 530, 659). The directors responded by announcing that they had found gold in Castlemaine and were buying a special extractor to process the rock there. Shareholders were not impressed as this was a common ploy amongst such companies at the time and several shareholders instituted legal action against the directors for false representation (MJ 1854, 228).

The first of these was heard before the Court of Exchequer in the summer of 1854 when a shareholder named Barstow demanded the return of his £200 investment on the grounds that the prospectus issued by the company initially 'bore no relationship to the geological reality' at Castlemaine. His claim was upheld and the justice commented that the directors' activities in relation to the mine were 'a great piece of injustice'. This, of

course, opened the way for other shareholders to take similar action against the original promoters who would be personally liable (MJ 1854, 453).

Plant's case against them for the recovery of his £600 was due to be held in the autumn of 1854. Somehow (the hand of Gibson?), however, the State stepped in and preferred criminal charges against the Royal Hibernian Mining Company using Plant as prime witness. The hearing took place over September-October of that year and Gibson, Wilkes, etc. were exonerated from what seem to be suspiciously un-proveable charges. While this may have simply been a delaying tactic by Gibson, his other chickens were presumably also coming home to roost (MJ 1854, 846).

By March 1855 he was reported to be in the bankruptcy court and with Doyle's charges against him pending he skipped the country and was reported to be living in Paris the following month (MJ 1855, 156 & 245). Plant, meanwhile, seems to have appealed his case to the Court of Exchequer but with Gibson missing could only cite Wilkes' part. Once again Plant lost (MJ 1855, 413). The formality of winding-up the Royal Hibernian Mining Company followed this in January 1856 but once again something strange took place and the liquidation did not happen, reportedly because the official liquidator did not have his case properly prepared (MJ 1856, 140). However suspicious that may seem, it does appear that somebody continued to pursue Gibson and whatever assets he had left in England must have been seized as it was reported in 1859 that 4s 9d in the £1 had been paid to his creditors (MJ 1856, 140). Thus squalidly ended Ireland's most extravagantly pretentious mine promoter.

POSTSCRIPT

An attempt was made to re-open **Kenmare** in 1910-1911. A *South of Ireland Mining Company* was established (also called the *Southern Mines of Ireland*) which then set up a new company *Arduilly Mines Ltd.* According to local manager, John Heckie, the enterprise was under-financed (£3,500) and that money was ill-used by the promoter, D.O.M. Leahy. In clearing out the old shafts to 100 feet (Daly 1918 quoting report by Heckie) 59 tons of low-grade copper was raised and sold for £66 but the company went bankrupt before the bottom was reached (Min. Stats.).

However, the 18th century open-cast was still in place into the 1990s. Of the 19th century workings a series of water-ducts for ore-processing was uncovered at Cahir townland in the 1940s. Some walls survived into the 1950s including the powder house. However, the only folk memory of mining there was the term "pond field" (O'Connor 1993). It seems that **Castlemaine** mine was never worked again and no sign remains of this inflated enterprise on the flat green fields of Annagh.

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